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# Andropov's Political Position: The Importance of the June Plenum

An Intelligence Assessment

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### **Andropov's Political Position: The Importance of the June Plenum**

#### **Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 31 May 1983  
was used in this report.*

After six months as CPSU General Secretary, Andropov has brought about a distinct change in the style and tone of Kremlin deliberations and a new sense of purposefulness to regime policies. Although he has yet to consolidate his political support in the Politburo or unveil a comprehensive policy program of his own, since late March there have been indications that he may have the momentum to do so:

- The 24 March appointment of his ally, Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko, as First Deputy Premier probably strengthened Andropov's position in the Council of Ministers and may have laid the groundwork for a move against one of Brezhnev's former cronies in the Politburo, Premier Nikolay Tikhonov.
- Andropov's stature as a political leader has been bolstered by increasingly deferential treatment in the Soviet media, and particularly by the public acknowledgment that he is Chairman of the USSR Defense Council.
- The appointment of a new Chief of the Central Committee's Organizational Party Work Department indicates that Andropov is making progress in gaining control over sensitive personnel appointments.

These political gains were facilitated by the sidelining of Andropov's putative rival, Konstantin Chernenko, by illness for two months this spring.

Andropov loyalists and other Soviet sources are now confidently predicting that high-level changes will be made at the next Central Committee plenum, reportedly set for mid-June. This meeting is important for Andropov. He is operating under a number of time constraints, and it is essential that he begin to reshape the top ruling bodies:

- Not to make progress in this regard, in view of the expectations that have been raised, would be widely interpreted among the party elite as a sign of significant weakness.
- Some personnel actions are urgent. The failure to name a new President has become a source of concern among Soviet officials, and that office cannot be left unfilled without signaling serious political division and stalemate in the Politburo. The death of the Politburo's oldest member, Arvid Pelshe, creates another vacancy to be filled.

Time is of essence in other respects. Now almost 69 years old and in uncertain health, Andropov cannot count on a long tenure in which to leave his mark on the future course of Soviet policy. His discipline campaign—intended to end malingering, root out corruption, and increase accountability and efficiency throughout the system—may have initially improved economic performance, but it is likely to lose its effect unless combined with other measures to provide incentives and reorganize the management structure.

Andropov reportedly believes more substantial changes in the economic system are necessary. A new department of the Central Committee has been set up to develop proposals for changing the economic mechanism, but Soviet sources contend that Andropov will move cautiously in this area. He probably does not yet have a comprehensive reform program in mind; and he realistically cannot hope to launch such a program until he has made some changes in the Politburo to bring it under his control.

The personnel actions taken at the June plenum should provide some indication of how fast Andropov will be able to move, and clearer signals on his policy preferences may emerge. Full implementation of his policies is likely to depend on those who come after him, and perhaps the most he can achieve is to bring to the top the kind of officials best suited to carry out his policies. The increased prominence accorded party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and Andropov's evident intention to give new party Secretary Nikolay Ryzhkov significant authority over economic policy suggests that he is already giving attention to this problem. )

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### Andropov's Political Position: The Importance of the June Plenum

#### Andropov Strengthens His Position

General Secretary Andropov has regained the political initiative in recent weeks, following a period in February and March when his efforts to consolidate his position seemed frustrated by ill health and political opposition. Since late March there have been a number of indications that he has significantly strengthened his position. The appointment of Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko as First Deputy Premier on 24 March placed this Andropov ally in the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and possibly laid the groundwork for a future move against one of Brezhnev's former cronies in the Politburo, Premier Nikolai Tikhonov. Gromyko's seniority on the Politburo diminishes Tikhonov's authority and lends credence to rumors that he is on the way out.

This promotion had all the appearances of adroit backroom maneuvering by Andropov. Tikhonov was on an official visit to Yugoslavia when the announcement was made—a coincidence in timing that suggested a deliberate attempt by Andropov to steal a march on his Politburo opponents. The hasty return of another ally, Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov, from Hungary on 23 March suggests that his presence was needed for the 24 March Politburo meeting that probably made the decision on Gromyko. Two days later, moreover, several high-level military promotions were announced that suggested Andropov was consolidating his ties with the high command and perhaps preparing the ground for a shift in Ustinov's responsibilities within the leadership. Rumors have indicated he might be in line for the presidency or the premiership, and [ ] has now heard from [ ] that Ground Forces Commander Vasily Petrov, one of the generals promoted, will soon replace Ustinov as Defense Minister.

The pace of personnel shifts also has picked up after a lull in February and March. The appointment of Yegor Ligachev as head of the Central Committee's Organizational Party Work Department—a post critical to control of personnel assignments—and evidence that the former head, party Secretary Ivan Kapitonov,

is now responsible for high military and civil goods, appears to be a particularly important step in Andropov's attempt to expand his influence in the area of personnel assignments. Chernenko, however,

Ligachev's closest political ties were probably with former party Secretary Andrey Kirilenko, with whom he first worked in the RSFSR party bureau in the early 1960s. This is the second major appointment of a presumed Kirilenko protégé since Andropov took over—party Secretary Kyzhkov also had close connections with Kirilenko and with other members of the Kirilenko network. This suggests that Andropov was able to take advantage of Kirilenko's retirement last November for reasons of health to form an alliance with some of his followers. Their interests would seem to coincide: Andropov lacks a strong political following in the party apparatus and they need a patron.

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may still have some oversight responsibilities for cadre matters. As recently as 24 May, *Pravda* commended his writings on this subject.

Equally significant, the Soviet media have dropped some of their former restraint in reporting personal praise of Andropov, and there appears to be a new effort to underscore his prestige and authority. He has been publicly identified as Chairman of the USSR Defense Council. Moreover, a Central Committee agricultural conference, held on 18 April, further buttressed Andropov's leadership image. The conference, which had the appearance of a miniplenum, was attended not only by his Politburo colleagues, but by all the republic and oblast party bosses—the group that some Andropov partisans acknowledged had been lukewarm in its support of him. Andropov's participation in the conference gave him a much-needed opportunity to demonstrate his authority and develop some rapport with this key group. The appointment of

Ligachev, who has served for over 17 years as a regional leader, probably was reassuring to these regional officials as well. . .

Andropov's political efforts were undoubtedly helped by Konstantin Chernenko's illness and incapacitation during April and most of May. Chernenko's office told reporters that he had pneumonia, explaining his absence from several major leadership gatherings—the agricultural conference, Lenin's anniversary, and May Day. He also was unable to go to Berlin to give the address for the Marx anniversary celebration in mid-April. Several indications—the appearance of his portrait with those of other leaders at the May Day celebration, a review of his latest book, and his signature on obituaries—suggest that he is not on his way out of the leadership. Moreover, there continue to be rumors that ideology will be the subject of the June

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plenum and that he will give the main report. Nevertheless, to be sidelined at such a critical period must have weakened his position.

#### Soviet Policy Under Andropov

Despite Andropov's initial strong showing on assuming the General Secretary post and recent signs that his political bandwagon is gaining momentum, he still does not control the Politburo. Until he has made some changes in that and other top ruling bodies, it is not likely that he will be able to set his stamp on the direction of regime policies.

So far the changes in policy that the Andropov leadership has brought about, while significant, are more a matter of style and tone than of substance. The emphasis has been on policy continuity in domestic and foreign affairs and improved implementation of existing policies. This strategy appears to have given new impetus to some old Brezhnev policies. Many of these--particularly agriculture and the Food Program--are closely identified with leaders other than Andropov and may not even enjoy his wholehearted support. Before becoming party leader, he did not give public support to the Food Program, and some [ ] have implied that he has reservations about some aspects of it. Nonetheless, for now he has thrown his weight behind it.

#### Leadership Style and Discipline

Andropov has sought to convey an image of strong leadership that sharply contrasts with the more lax style of the later Brezhnev years. [ ]

[ ] Soviet officials have made this explicit, blaming Brezhnev for indecisiveness, failure to follow through on the implementation of decisions, and unwillingness to hold errant officials to account. Andropov, they claim, is determined to change all this.

Andropov's influence has been most obvious in the discipline campaign, a broad gauge effort to tighten up performance at the workplace and eliminate corruption and mismanagement at all levels of the party and government. The introduction of militia spot checks for truant workers is only one aspect--and the most transitory one--of a general effort to increase accountability and efficiency throughout the system.

Andropov's overall strategy would seem to represent the most practical course open to him, given his inexperience in domestic economic matters and his lack of strong institutional support in the economic apparatus and among regional party officials. In particular, the stress on economic discipline holds out the possibility of improving economic performance in the near term without new investments or risky policy departures. The higher growth rates in industrial production and labor productivity achieved for the first quarter of 1983 are probably partially attributable to the discipline campaign. Moreover, if the Soviet leaders pushed implementation of measures already on the books, such as the 1979 management reform or the 1980 decree on agricultural incentives and planning, economic performance might be considerably helped.

#### Economic Reform

The discipline campaign is not likely to have any long-term economic impact, however, unless it is combined with other measures to improve incentives and revitalize the management mechanism. [ ] contend that the discipline campaign is designed to lay the foundation for more fundamental changes in the economic system.

Available evidence indicates that Andropov believes that changes are necessary, but he does not appear to have yet fleshed out a blueprint. His remarks on the subject since assuming office have been limited primarily to passing reference in his November 1982 plenary speech to the need to study East European experience and the importance of giving enterprises and farm managers more authority. Andropov loyalists claim that he is familiar with the Hungarian economic reform and credit him with protecting this experiment in quasi-market socialism from orthodox detractors in the Soviet leadership.

[ ] Hungary's New Economic Mechanism (NEM) is the most extensive experiment in economic decentralization being carried out in the Soviet Bloc. As in the other Communist countries, Hungarian central authorities formulate state plans and set macroeconomic goals. Under the NEM, however, the Hungarians rely heavily on indirect economic regulators and market forces rather than on binding plan targets and administrative controls to guide decentralized economic processes.

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Work on studying various reform models has speeded up, moreover, since Andropov took over. According to several Soviet officials, the new party Secretary Nikolay Ryzhkov was assigned specific responsibility for developing proposals for change in the economic mechanism. Party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's remarks in his 22 April Lenin Day speech suggest as well that some work on a reform package may be in progress. He noted that "measures are currently being prepared to obtain a better blend of centralism and local initiative in economic planning and management."

[ ] have recently [ ] an associated reorganization of the central party apparatus is also being prepared. This reorganization, which would involve the Central Committee's economic departments, would be aimed at giving the party apparatus greater control over long-range economic planning and strategy and is seen by Soviet officials as a prelude to economic reform. Progress, however, is slow. No time has yet been set for the much-ballyhooed plenum on reforming the economic mechanism, mentioned first by Brezhnev, and ideology (not economics) is rumored to be the subject for the June plenum.

Soviet sources, moreover, have sought to play down the prospects that the plenum on reform of the economic mechanism—when it does occur—will launch sweeping changes. Reform-minded supporters of Andropov who initially predicted that he would make major changes now emphasize the formidable bureaucratic obstacles to any significant moves in the direction of economic decentralization. They warn that any serious effort at reform is at best years away and even then is likely to be modest in scope.

Several Andropov consultants—most notably Fedor Burlatskiy—have stressed that even modest reform goals must be preceded by rejuvenation of the party and government ranks. They point out that no reform will work until government and party functionaries of the Brezhnev era are replaced by more efficiency-minded managers. For this reason, they say, the Andropov leadership is concentrating first on "cadre building."

#### Leadership Infighting

Sources close to Andropov have privately claimed that he intended to use the discipline and anticorruption campaign to gain control of the party apparatus, clean out deadwood, and bring in new people who were more attuned to modern management methods and more supportive of his policy initiatives. His efforts initially appeared to go smoothly. He appears to have been instrumental in the promotions of two young industrial managers from the Gosplan hierarchy—Nikolay Ryzhkov to the party secretariat and Nikolay Slyunkov as Belorussian party chief. Other high-level changes, particularly in the Council of Ministers and the propaganda apparatus, were made in December and January. A Brezhnev crony in the Ministry of the Interior was removed and replaced by one of Andropov's proteges, KGB Chairman Vitaliy Fedorchuk.

Nevertheless, Andropov's strategy appeared to run into some resistance, reportedly because of widespread fear among the elite and opposition to his program among his Politburo colleagues. Several press articles in early February attacking "factionalism" in the party suggested that Andropov's cadre renewal campaign was meeting high-level resistance. In early March, dissident Soviet historian Roy Medvedev claimed that infighting had intensified and that the influence of Chernenko and Tikhonov had increased, as officials fearful of losing their jobs tried to back them as a counterweight to Andropov. Chernenko is reportedly popular among regional officials and may have become a rallying point for threatened ministers and bureaucrats. They evidently see his presence on the Politburo as serving to protect their interests and providing someone to turn to if Andropov stumbles.

The pace of leadership replacements slowed markedly in February and March, with almost no changes above the deputy minister level and virtually no shifts among important regional party officials that suggested the weeding out of incompetent officials. Some officials continued to hold their jobs who earlier had

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been rumored to be on their way out—Leonid Zamyatin, a Brezhnev-Chernenko loyalist and International Information Department Chief, was one. Even the exposes of corruption by high-level officials became less frequent.

#### **Politburo Balance and Andropov's Health**

Andropov's political program probably ran into difficulty for several reasons, foremost among them the delicate political balance within the Politburo and his health problems. Although he probably commands a plurality on most major issues and has no strong political rivals within the Politburo, he does not have a solid majority committed to him. Until illness sidelined Chernenko, Andropov's opponents were evidently able to muster sufficient strength to block or slow down his efforts to expand his control over the party and government machinery.

We do not know the precise political alignments within the Politburo. Consistent and generally credible reporting from a number of Soviet sources provides a good basis for speculation, however. Ustinov and Gromyko are generally described by Soviet sources as the core of Andropov's political support, and together they constitute a powerful leadership troika. Both allies now play a more prominent role

than they did under Brezhnev and have been frequently rumored as candidates for the premiership or presidency. While Andropov retains the role of the most authoritative regime spokesman on major policy issues, he has left responsibility for day-to-day conduct of policy to his colleagues. Gromyko's recent appointment as first deputy premier gives him broader responsibilities over the entire foreign policy field and would seem to enhance his authority as a regime spokesman.

More recently there have been signs of a budding alliance between Andropov and Gorbachev, who has been closely associated with the more innovative aspects of the Food Program and has gained prominence as a regime spokesman for agriculture. Part of Andropov's reason for supporting the Food Program was probably a desire to forge this alliance, and his appearance with Gorbachev at the Central Committee agricultural conference was a major boost for the youngest Politburo member. The choice of Gorbachev to make the Lenin anniversary address was another sign that he enjoys Andropov's favor, and at least one Soviet source is touting him as Andropov's heir apparent.

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The Politburo's other members have been variously described as ranging from uncommitted to opposed, the latter category including Brezhnev's former cronies Tikhonov, Chernenko, and Kazakh party boss Dinmukhamed Kunayev. Four members—Viktor Grishin, Grigoriy Romanov, Vladimir Shcherbitskiy, and Geydar Aliyev—remain the subject of considerable speculation.

Several sources have indicated recently that the three regional party bosses—Moscow First Secretary Grishin, Ukrainian party chief Shcherbitskiy, and Leningrad party boss Romanov—are either in opposition to Andropov or on the fence. If true, this would be a significant switch in allegiance for Shcherbitskiy, who was credibly reported to have been an early backer of Andropov and thus slated for a high position in Moscow. Rumors of his imminent promotion soon ceased, however, and recent indirect criticism of his stewardship in the Ukraine by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet suggests that his political prospects may have dimmed.

Andropov's ability to gain the support of his Politburo colleagues will be affected by their perceptions of his health and by sheer political conservatism on their part.

Whatever the precise nature of Andropov's medical problems, uncertainty in the leadership regarding his health may have created political problems for him. Cadre renewal lost some of its momentum in January, and reports of resistance to Andropov's efforts to consolidate his position surfaced with greater frequency.

#### Prospects

The June Central Committee plenum is likely to be a major watershed for Andropov. The time constraints under which he operates makes it essential that he begin reshaping the top ruling bodies. It is important that he make some progress, if only because expectations have been raised so high. Since last December, Andropov loyalists have been insisting that important personnel actions would be made by early summer. Not to meet this schedule would be widely interpreted among the party and government elite as a sign of significant weakness.

We believe that the plenum (and the Supreme Soviet session to follow on 16 June) will shuffle responsibilities within the leadership and bring in some new

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faces, rather than removing present members. Andropov and company already have a number of leadership vacancies to fill that are bound to be the subject of political infighting. The position of president (chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet), which Brezhnev held, has not been filled since his death. References at Soviet propaganda lectures to the lack of action on this question suggest that it has become a source of increasing concern in Soviet officialdom and is considered a source of political weakness for Andropov. Andropov may want to take this position himself; but such a move—while it would increase his stature as the USSR's authoritative leader—would not add significantly to his actual political power. Some rumors have indicated that Andropov would like to put Tikhonov in the largely symbolic presidency, and thus be able to position an ally—perhaps Ustinov—as premier.

The death on 30 May of the Politburo's oldest member, 84-year-old Arvid Pelshe, creates yet another important vacancy to be filled. Pelshe had served since 1966 as chairman of the Party Control Committee, the party's highest disciplinary review board.

The party Secretariat is also a key battleground for political infighting. Only three Central Committee secretaries—Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev—are full members of the Politburo. The position on the Politburo as the senior secretary for industry has not been filled since Kirilenko retired. Vladimir Dolgikh (a candidate Politburo member and party secretary) and Ryzhkov are obvious rivals for this important slot, with Ryzhkov probably being Andropov's choice. With the appointment of a new personnel chief in the Central Committee apparatus, a change in secretariat responsibility for cadres is also likely. Ivan Kapitonov, the longtime cadres secretary, appears to have been assigned to less sensitive duties in the Secretariat, possibly paving the way for the elevation to the party Secretariat of Ligachev, his replacement as cadre department head.

Andropov cannot begin to put a strong personal stamp on the direction of Soviet policy or launch a comprehensive program of his own until he has gained better control over party and government machinery. But

time is growing short. Although changes in the economic mechanism can conceivably be deferred, the leadership will have to address allocation issues before approving the 1984 economic plan in the fall, and signals must soon be given to the economic planners about national priorities for the 12th Five-Year Plan (1986-90).

The personnel actions taken at the June plenum will provide some idea of the direction and speed of Andropov's moves. If he can consolidate his position at the plenum, then more explicit signals as to his preferences on economic management and resource allocation may begin to emerge. Given his age and uncertain health, Andropov is undoubtedly aware that he may have little time to make his mark. He probably cannot hope to be around to see his programs fully implemented, and perhaps the most he will be able to do is bring into the top leadership the kind of officials who he thinks can follow the lead that he favors. Gorbachev and Ryzhkov apparently represent the type of officials he has in mind. )

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Interlocking Directorate of  
the Soviet Leadership

Party	Date of		Secretariat	Regional Post	Government	Presidium of Supreme Soviet
	Birth	Election				
Full Member						
Andropov	6/15/14	4/27/73	General Secretary			Member
Aliyev	5/10/23	11/22/82			1st Deputy Chairman	
Chernenko	9/24/11	11/27/78	Ideology			
Gorbachev	3/02/31	10/21/80	Agriculture			
Grishin	9/18/14	4/09/71		Moscow party boss		Member
Gromyko	7/18/09	4/27/73			Minister of Foreign Affairs and 1st Deputy Chairman	
Kunayev	1/12/12	4/09/71		Kazakhstan party boss		Member
Romanov	2/07/23	3/06/76		Leningrad party boss		Member
Shcherbitskiy	2/17/18	4/09/71		Ukraine party boss		Member
Tikhonov	5/14/05	11/27/79			Chairman	
Ustinov	10/30/08	3/06/76			Minister of Defense	
Candidate Member						
Demichev	1/03/18	11/01/64			Minister of Culture	
Dolgikh	12/25/24	5/24/82	Industry			
Kuznetsov	2/13/01	10/03/77				1st Deputy Chairman
Ponomarev	1/17/05	5/19/72	Nonruling Communist parties			
Rashidov	11/06/17	10/31/61		Uzbek party boss		Member
Shevardnadze	1/25/28	11/27/78		Georgian party boss		
Solomentsev	11/07/13	11/23/71			RSFSR Premier	
			Kapitonov — Light industry and consumer goods			
			Zimyanin — Propaganda, ideology			
			Rusakov — Ruling Communist parties			
			Ryzhkov — Economic management			

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